



# NEWS RELEASE

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## **PRESIDENT CLINTON ANNOUNCES DISASTER ASSISTANCE FOR DROUGHT-STRICKEN TEXAS FARMERS**

WASHINGTON, July 23, 1998 -- President Bill Clinton today announced that disaster assistance will be available throughout Texas for agriculture producers suffering losses because of this summer's drought. Secretary of Agriculture Dan Glickman has designated the entire state of Texas as a disaster area due to drought and excessive heat.

The drought has damaged most Texas crops to the extent that many fields may not be worth harvesting. Crops adversely affected by the dry, hot conditions include cotton, sorghum, popcorn, forage, and corn. Many areas of Texas have received less than a third of their normal annual rainfall, and soil conditions in the entire state are classified as "severely" to "extremely dry." The National Weather Service predicts a high probability of continued drought throughout the rest of the 1998 growing season.

"We can't make it rain, but we can extend help to farmers who are suffering losses through no fault of their own," said Clinton. "This administration will move as quickly as possible to get assistance to qualifying agricultural producers."

Under this designation, The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Farm Service Agency (FSA) makes available low-interest loans to eligible farmers who have suffered a loss of 30 percent or more on any single crop. Qualifying producers must be creditworthy, unable to obtain credit elsewhere, and have adequate collateral to secure the loan.

USDA's Risk Management Agency estimates that more than 14 million acres of insured crops have been damaged by the drought, and that total insurance claims for crops covered by federal crop insurance could reach as high as \$700 million.

USDA expects a large number of requests for assistance under the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP). This program, which is administered by FSA, provides payments to growers of crops damaged by a natural disaster when crop insurance is not available. To help handle the heavy load of NAP requests, FSA has approved a Critical Loss Designation for Texas. The designation allows the agency's county office employees to carry out preliminary inspections to clear pending notices of loss under the program. Because such duties normally are performed only by contractors, this will allow for quicker response times.

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FSA also authorized emergency haying and grazing of conservation Reserve Program (CRP) acreage in counties with significant losses in hay and pasture production. Producers cannot both hay and graze the same CRP land. USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is providing haying and grazing plans for producers.

Farmers and ranchers can request that the NRCS State Conservationist give them an emergency waiver for Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) cost share contract applications before they are approved by the FSA committee. This waiver will allow specific farmers to start their conservation practices such as livestock water pipelines, irrigation systems, etc. immediately to save crops or livestock, without becoming ineligible for the contract, if selected..

"We're going into action to make sure that Texas farmers have access to assistance as soon as possible," Glickman said. "USDA employees and all Administration officials will do everything they can to serve agricultural producers in Texas with speed and effectiveness."

Farmers and ranchers who have suffered damages are encouraged to contact their local USDA Service Centers or FSA county offices for further information. These are listed in telephone books under "U.S. Government, Department of Agriculture. Farmers who have crop losses should notify their crop insurance agent immediately.

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